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## **School culture and school effectiveness: cooperation with environment as a leading way of learning**

### **Kultura szkoły i efektywność szkoły: współpraca ze środowiskiem jako wiodący sposób uczenia się**

#### **Abstract**

In any academic institution two action levels with regards to school organization can be found. On the one hand, the macro-political level basically concerned with educative legislation and how these rule educative institutions. On the other hand, the micro-political level concerning school priorities. Along this book chapter we will provide a research based on how the macro and the micro political levels should handle together. Hence, we will basically provide an updated theoretical framework focusing on the most relevant trends. Moreover, we will keep on with a deep analysis of how stakeholders and active agents promote and develop curricular prescriptions. Finally, we will analyze and discuss how far the implementation of educative principles contributes to enhance the students' interests and assumes their needs for a better teaching-learning process.

**Keywords:** school organization, national guidelines, educative legislation, macro and micro-political levels, teacher training.

#### **Streszczenie**

W każdej instytucji akademickiej można znaleźć dwa poziomy pracy nad organizacją szkoły. Jest to poziom makropolityki skupiony na legislacji edukacyjnej i jej wdrażaniu w instytucjach edukacyjnych, a także poziom mikropolityki i priorytetów szkolnych. W pracy zaprezentowano badania dotyczące współdziałania makro- i mikropolityki. Autorzy przedstawili zaktualizowane ramy teoretyczne dotyczące najistotniejszych trendów. Ponadto ukazano promocję i rozwój programów nauczania poprzez wykorzystanie interesariuszy i aktywistów. Przeprowadzono analizę i dyskusję dotyczącą implementacji zasad edukacyjnych przyczyniających się do rozszerzenia zainteresowań uczniów oraz realizowania ich potrzeb w procesie nauczania – uczenia się.

**Słowa kluczowe:** organizacja szkoły, wytyczne państwowe, legislacja edukacyjna, poziomy makro- i mikropolityki, szkolenie nauczycieli.

## Nature and scope of School Organization: implementation of inclusive education guidelines in schools

A preliminary question we may rather ask ourselves may focus on what distinguishes integration from inclusion in educative institutions. Obviously, there are a set of scientific theories that, along with educative acts, contribute to introduce the new educative goals to be assumed in schools. However, before going further on the macro-political level of School Organization, we would little by little introduce key terms to later on based on the data analysis.

Theories that focused on the micro-political level suggest it will condition the development the institution undertakes. The school has a significant role for students to be able to learn suitably. In fact, students do not have to adapt to the system, but rather the system must adapt to them, offering the necessary human and material resources. It seems a difficult task to be implemented, especially considering the micro-political level assumed in each educative institution.

For this reason, with the legislative framework provided by the macro-political level (educative acts, stakeholders' actions, etc.) and the trends assumed in the micro-political level, schools have to be able to design and develop an educative function based on plurality and respect for all students, in short, to be able to offer them a quality education<sup>1</sup>. More precisely, to assume and put into practice inclusive policies and pedagogical inclusive actions it is necessary to promote process of change and transformation that may start from an attitude change<sup>2</sup>.

The key issue lies on the configuration of the micro-political level, beliefs and perceptions that school agents share. What issues differentiate school integration from inclusion? Basically, the term integration refers to the educational response that the school provides to students with special education needs.

Generally speaking, students with learning disabilities, mental disabilities, aggressive behavior, sensory impairments or physical disabilities. In fact, the use of the term *special education needs* often excludes other students, for example, those who were socially, culturally, economically disadvantaged, who had different ethnic backgrounds, etc.

A key aspect of inclusion is the individual and tailored attention provided to students with special education needs, whatever their situation is, and especially to those who are disadvantaged, regardless of their origin. This development undoubtedly represents a forward step in the treatment of students who are in social vulnerability.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Cabero & M. Córdoba, *Educación inclusiva: la inclusión digital*, "Revista de Educación Inclusiva" 2009, 2(1), 61–77.

<sup>2</sup> M. López, *Ética y escuela pública: ¿Es posible una escuela sin exclusiones?* In Ipland et al., *La atención a la diversidad: diferentes miradas*, Huelva, Hergué, 13–53, 2008.

What changes can be introduced in inclusive schools to develop a truly inclusive inclusion to students with special education needs? What do stakeholders propose to face diversity? What values and attitudes must be shared to reach a genuine education? Firstly, it is essential to use adequate human resources, for example, teachers who really believe in the inclusion of students. They may also have received specific pedagogic training.

Secondly, the use of education materials tailored to the students' needs. Thirdly, the introduction of active methodology to offer students an active role. Fourthly, we must not forget the involvement of parents in their children's education processes, encouraging an active collaboration, supporting the teacher's work and offering advice. These assumptions for a deep development of inclusive education should be based on school consensus.

From the macro-political level the central government in Spain (the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports<sup>3</sup> located in Madrid) through their legislators create education acts. Then the Autonomous Communities, due to the education competences they have, adapt national Acts to the reality of each Community, following the national guidelines. Education inspectors, consultants, stakeholders, should share values, attitudes and common purposes. When this does not happen the resources to face diversity are ineffective.

Legislative Acts implement specific measures and resources to develop inclusion but they are no longer developed at schools. The other way round, when the stakeholders focus on the achievement of those measures, students' learning highly improves. They are made legally through the adoption of autonomous curricula but lack any efficiency.

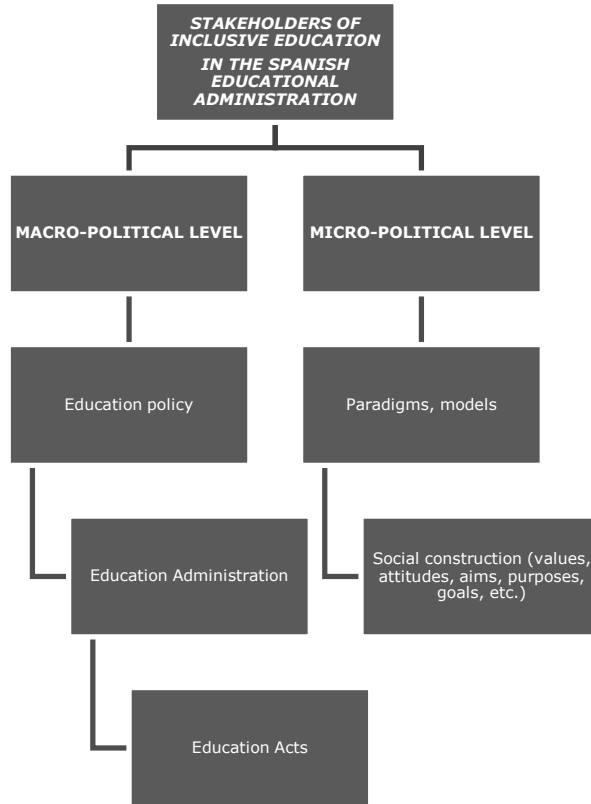
Generally speaking, the curricula developed in the different Autonomous Communities in Spain are those which the different Elementary and High Schools assume in their didactic projects. As they are prescribed by each Autonomous Administration, the teaching institutions must meet the principles, contents, methodology and assessment criteria stated in those regulations.

However, if the arguments exposed in those texts do not take into account the improvement of human and material resources provided to schools, teachers' efforts towards the development of inclusive education to face students' diversity will be fruitless. Particularly, we have to be able to work collaboratively.

On the other hand, the teacher's work in the classroom depends not only on his/her didactic performance, but also on the methodological line assumed by the school. If the teaching staff is not able to develop the principles, values and aims proposed by the stakeholders, if they do not share a common ground to develop their teaching-learning, teaching is not directed towards the same goal: to provide each student the support he/she requires.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://debateeducativo.mec.es/paginas/convocatorias.html> (Accessed: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2019).



Hence, how reality is developed? We cannot state that a real inclusive education is reached even though the legislative acts implement it. Most of the times what is prescribed by legislation is far from what schools need or what can be assumed in the institution. Moreover, there is another issue that has to be considered. Multiculturalism is one of the characteristics of our present-day society. As such, schools have a huge variety of students coming from very different countries. Thus, teachers need specific tools and resources.

### **Leading inclusive schools: evidence from the micro-political level**

No doubt, the school, as an integral part of society, must face these new socio-educational demands. The need to provide each student with the attention he/she requires is a constant challenge for teachers. Diversity can be manifested in different orders: unflattering family situations for the student's personal balance, mental or physical disabilities or diseases, interests, preferences and learning rates, etc.

Roughly speaking, these factors differentiate students even though they belong to the same class group. In order to cope with this heterogeneity, teachers have to undertake specific methodological principles that are not always established by the stakeholders but need to be developed in the micro-political level as far as those in charge of education are not especially concerned with them.

For example, when a foreign student is schooled he/she has to share his/her values with his/her peers, his/her culture, interest, knowledge with the aim of getting integrated in the group. Even his/her abilities could be different from others. But it will be one of the teacher's tasks to try to encourage an appropriate social environment in the classroom.

If the school system does not know how to deal with these socio-educational demands, it can no longer provide quality in education. To make a proper inclusion in mainstream schools, curricular, pedagogical, didactic changes are required. This means that organisation changes must be generated in accordance with the real possibilities and current needs. When this does not happen, if there is not any suitable education management from the school, inclusion can become a special education subsystem that only shares certain organizational and space arrangements with the regular education<sup>4</sup>.

The measures of attention to diversity that the current legislation implements through different stakeholders (inspectors, education policy makers, school advisors, etc.) are meaningless if limited to fragmentary interventions both at the Elementary and High education levels.

The inclusion of students with specific educational support needs to be shared at school, in the shaping of the micro-political level. If it is only prescribed by the macro-political level and even not considered, schools are unprotected towards the new incoming students. Teachers should share common policy principles, goals to be addressed, and also methodological guidelines related to students' diversity.

Particularly, parents have to participate and support the educational process. Education policy should encourage this process of inclusion, not only as keywords that govern the legislation texts, but by providing human and material resources. Many schools need support from Administration, not only in terms of staff but also by considering external resources in order to support the teaching-learning processes.

To a greater or lesser point, schools are mainly characterised by a diverse education reality which is quite difficult to be assumed. They do not only need more material resources, but often human resources are not sufficient or the most adequate ones in such an increasingly diverse and multicultural environment as the current one.

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<sup>4</sup> E. Avramidis & B. Norwich, *Teacher's Attitudes toward Integration/Inclusion. A Review of the Literature*, "European Journal of Special Needs Education" 2000, 2(17), 129–148.

In this sense, schools have to undertake common principles to effectively manage the centre through a coherent and coordinated action of all members of the education community. This view must be shared by stakeholders to support education in each stage and contribute to make easier access to human and material resources.

The assumption of these common principles, values and attitudes is usually reached in schools to offer the education required by each student. However, even though sometimes they are stated in the legislative text and are orally extended by the stakeholders, they use to remain as perfect words, legitimized words teachers must use in their speeches<sup>5</sup>.

As an example of how stakeholders' indications are somehow reflected in official education documents we necessarily have to mention the School Educational Project. If designed appropriately and coherently on the basis of the schools' needs and the stakeholders' prescriptions, it will favour the development of an appropriate school inclusion.

The School Education Project is a document that shows how the school conceives education, what values, aims and structure it has and how education is developed. It is created in schools following the stakeholders' prescriptions. If the information reflected in this document were truly assumed in schools, we would state that the stakeholders' guidelines were efficient and functional at schools as far as they were developed.

Unfortunately, this document does not always show the real development of the educational process. Even though the main aim of the guidelines stated by the stakeholders is to improve education, by offering the right answer to all students, the macro-political level is not always related to the micro-political level.

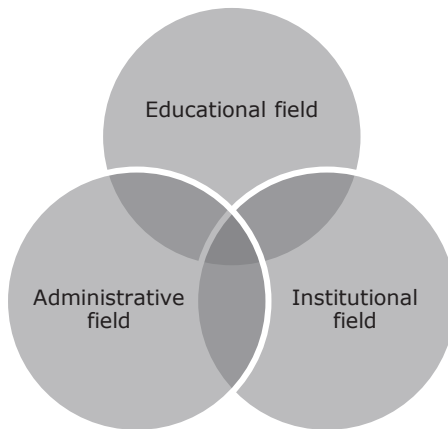
Note as an example about how this document shows a coherent development of the education assumed by the school staff, and prescribed by stakeholders, we should mention the three fields it focuses on:

- a) the educational field (how the school assumes the education process, what values, attitudes and purposes the school develops);
- b) the institutional field (school management, organization, resources, etc.);
- c) the administrative field (teachers, specialists in Therapeutic Pedagogy, number of students per class, timetable, etc.).

The norms to create this official document are stated by the legislation implemented by the stakeholders in the macro-political level. Furthermore, the development of this document has to deal with the micro-political level as it is going to be developed in a specific school.

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<sup>5</sup> R. López, *Bases conceptuales de la inclusión educativa*, Avances en supervisión educativa: Revista de la Asociación de Inspectores de Educación de España, 14, 2011.



First of all, if we focus on the educational field, we may pay attention to the school organization, cycle equipment, level staff, specific methodology, the assumption of common criteria for students' promotion, students' grouping, evaluation, etc.

Secondly, the institutional field is conditioned by the school external relationships (relationship with the Parents' Association, Administration, etc.) and the internal relationship in the school (government/management bodies, functions they assume, commissions, degrees of participation, etc.).

Third and finally, the administrative field related to school economic management, accountability, uses of space, mass-media rooms, etc. Human resources and interpersonal relationships (motivation, communication, and conflicts), regulation of coexistence, selection and promotion of teachers, etc. should never be overlooked. These aspects and the actions involved in education policy hinder the effective management of the school.

## **Discussions and conclusions**

The school needs tools to support the actions of the educational community. The teacher that faces multiculturalism and students' diversity acts as a facilitator of the teaching-learning processes. Thus, the development of the educational practice starts from the requirements of prevention and the settlement of students' difficulties, understanding that both conditions must be implemented as soon as possible in the school environment. The attention to classroom diversity must be assumed in terms of cognitive abilities and in terms of cultural backgrounds.

It is therefore imperative to understand that differences and inequalities should be addressed through affirmative strategies, not by universal solutions within the framework of an inclusive school. This implies the assumption of the principles

of intercultural education in line with the growing multiculturalism and diversity that characterizes our society. These actions will favor citizenship education to let students acquire an integral education, a life-long learning process.

Roughly speaking, inclusive education should be built in an education community as a general action framework integrated by all agents involved in the education process. A cooperative endeavour of all education agents and every moment of the school life is essential. In order to achieve these aims, we should promote the students' interest in school work, by reinforcing the previous motivational processes.

Hence, it is also necessary to support the students' learning processes by seeking individual attention, without affecting the group dimension in the classroom work<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, it is advisable to keep an adequate environment to favour coexistence in the classroom and in the whole school as a prerequisite for the appropriate development of the school work. We do not have to forget that it is necessary to help to reduce school absenteeism and the subsequent students' failure. We should also strengthen cooperation with families, other neighborhood institutions and other social settings.

Therefore, inclusive education in school needs to establish links that extend and enhance the educational efforts beyond the school environment. Finally, it is also convenient to enhance the process of education innovation, further evaluation and investigation that should feed all innovative proposals.

Particularly, if schools contribute to the development of inclusive education, the existing measures to address students with specific education needs increase as long as the learning processes are based on their interests and this creates motivation in students. These principles not only sustain the so-called "inclusive school" but also favour integration and inclusion of disabled students.

In general terms, school is characterized by an incoming diversity and it is our task to train pre-service teachers suitably to assume the didactic processes successfully. It requires highly skilled and motivated professionals to be able to meet that diversity. The specific pedagogical processes must contribute to the creation of a social classroom environment where the student feels comfortable enough and motivated towards learning, thus the attitude will be positive towards learning.

In this sense, the stakeholders determine the most relevant aims, basic competences, contents, methodological principles and assessment criteria to be taught and reached at Elementary and High schools. As far as these are prescriptive, all schools nationwide must develop them. However, this lack of coherent development from the macro-political to the micro-political level keeps a handicap in the attention provided, especially to students with specific need of education support.

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<sup>6</sup> F.J. Hinojo, I. Aznar, M.P. Cáceres, J.M. Romero, *Opinión de futuros equipos docentes de educación primaria sobre la implementación del mobile learning en el aula*, "Revista Electrónica Educare" 2019, 23(3), 1–17.



What could be stated as the main aim to be assumed? The main aim focuses on how to offer students the individualized attention they require to be able to develop their cognitive and social skills. The schools, on the other hand, set their aims and priorities, following obviously the prescriptions of the Autonomous Education Administration. Among them, learning to learn, being adult, responsible people and acting as such are key principles in any compulsory educational stage.

No doubt, there are other issues to be considered to reach an appropriate school inclusion. Above all, the stakeholders' prescriptions highly condition the development inclusion can have at schools. In this regard, it is a task to be assumed by the teaching staff in the micro-political level how to face the school diversity. Didactics as a scientific discipline offers us paradigms, principles and approaches to introduce them in the teaching-learning processes. One thing must be clear, the development of the teaching-learning processes must offer students the necessary tools to reach learning.

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